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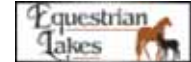


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## Louisville cooks up pitch for FFA convention

### Surprise breakfast held for site panel

BY SHELDON S. SHAFER • [SSHAFER@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM](mailto:sshafer@courier-journal.com) • JUNE 13, 2008

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Amid substantial fanfare, Louisville officials made a strong pitch yesterday to woo the National FFA Organization's lucrative annual convention "back home."

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After 14 cities initially entered the bidding, Louisville and Indianapolis are the last two still in the running for the annual gathering of America's largest youth organization.

FFA is seeking a site for seven years, with a possible three-year extension. The convention was held in Louisville from 1999 to 2005.

A seven-member FFA site-selection committee that spent Monday and Tuesday inspecting Indianapolis' facilities saw what Louisville has to offer



Photos by Chris Hall, The Courier-Journal

Kentucky FFA members Thomas Lundy, right, and April Lewis helped welcome a National FFA Organization site-selection committee at a surprise breakfast yesterday at Freedom Hall.

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Louisville's main effort was a surprise breakfast for the committee members yesterday at Freedom Hall.

A bugler played the "Call to the Post" as the selection committee was escorted into the building.

Dennis Fiscus of Arizona, chairman of the committee, led the march down a red carpet on the Freedom Hall floor.

Several hundred FFA members in blue

corduroy jackets lined both sides of the carpet, leading the applause as the beaming committee members entered the hall.

Fiscus high-fived people all the way to the stage, where the head table was set up. "Wow!" he said, adding that the sea of blue FFA jackets in the arena gave him goose bumps.

Dignitaries, including Lt. Gov. Daniel Mongiardo, state Agriculture Commissioner Richie Farmer and Metro Mayor Jerry Abramson, welcomed the committee, imploring the FFA to return to Louisville.

State Commerce Secretary Marcheta Sparrow announced that the committee members were being made Kentucky colonels.

Billy Ray Smith, former agriculture commissioner and now the executive director of the Kentucky FFA Foundation, said, "We know you are going to make the right decision."

Afterward, Abramson said, "We gave it our best shot."

And in a brief departing interview, Fiscus said both Indianapolis and Louisville are great cities.

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Dennis Fiscus, right, chairman of the site-selection committee, said "Wow!" after seeing the welcome his group received. Louisville and Indianapolis are the finalists to be FFA convention host starting in 2013.

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The celebration breakfast was similar to a shindig that Louisville organized for another FFA site-selection committee in 1996. Soon thereafter the FFA decided to move its convention from Kansas City, Mo., where it had been for decades, to Louisville for seven years from 1999 to 2005.

But in 2002, the FFA, an agribusiness group that formerly was called the Future Farmers of America and has nearly 500,000 members, decided to move its convention to Indianapolis from 2006 to 2012. Among other reasons, the group indicated Louisville had a shortage of hotel rooms. But Louisville has since added several major hotels, and more are planned.

Now the FFA is looking for a home for its convention for 2013-19. A decision is expected to be announced by the FFA's national board after this year's convention in Indianapolis Oct. 22-25.

About 1,500 FFA members, [business](#) and community leaders were invited to the breakfast, with about 500 attending, said Harold Workman, president of the Kentucky State Fair Board. He oversees the Kentucky Exposition Center, where the FFA would conduct most of its business.

Workman expressed confidence that the FFA will choose Louisville, bringing about 55,000 visitors to the city and generating about \$35 million a year for the local economy.

He said Louisville's advantages include new development and "energy" downtown and the secure environment offered by the exposition center.

The national convention-recruitment effort coincided with the state FFA convention being held in Louisville this week.

Among the Kentucky FFA members at the breakfast was Amy Cissell of Bardstown, who will enroll this fall at the University of Kentucky to study agricultural public service and leadership. She said she attended two FFA conventions in Louisville and two in Indianapolis.

Cissell said she preferred Louisville as a convention site because, at the fairgrounds,

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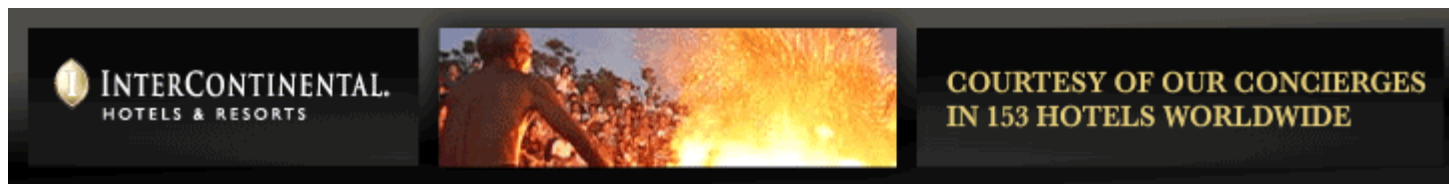


"everything is close together," while in Indianapolis "everything was spread out," with events and activities scattered at several venues.

The conventions, she said, "offer a chance to meet a lot of people and develop [leadership](#) skills."

Reporter Sheldon S. Shafer can be reached at (502) 582-7089.

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